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LETTER DATED 17 JANUARY 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LEBANON TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Lebanon hereby requests the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which expires on 31 January 1997, for a further interim period of six months, on the basis of the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and all other relevant resolutions and decisions of the Security Council.

In view of Israel's continued aggression against Lebanon and the serious setbacks suffered by the peace process, it must be emphasized that the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) remains the only way to stop the violence in southern Lebanon, enabling the Government of Lebanon to extend its sovereign authority throughout the area under occupation to the internationally recognized boundaries, and re-establish law and order throughout the region.

In this context, UNIFIL represents the international community's commitment to the restoration of Lebanon's full sovereignty and territorial integrity. UNIFIL's role is to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area. Its support and humanitarian assistance are helpful to the civilian population, who have expressed their great appreciation. However, this assistance cannot be a substitute for the fulfilment of UNIFIL's original mandate as stipulated in resolution 425 (1978).

The Monitoring Group, which emanated from the April 1996 understanding, in the wake of the Israeli aggression of April 1996, has played a role in reducing the intensity of the shelling directed against civilians in southern Lebanon and western Bekaa. However, the objective of this Group is necessarily of a temporary nature and is in no way an alternative to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which called upon Israel to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory.

Lebanon's comprehensive national recovery remains hampered by Israel's continued occupation of southern Lebanon and its daily aggression against its territory and citizens.

Israel continues to refuse the release of hundreds of innocent Lebanese detainees held for years in Israeli jails and the notorious detention camps in Al-Khiam and Marjayoun, in southern Lebanon, manned by the Israelis in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Many of the detainees are suffering from serious diseases as a result of harsh living conditions, subjection to ill-treatment and denial of medical care. Others have died in the camps or shortly after being released. The detainees have been subjected to physical and mental torture in further violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Lebanon remains wholly committed to the Middle East peace process in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Lebanon agreed to participate in the Madrid peace conference and subsequent rounds of negotiations in Washington on the basis of resolution 425 (1978), as was confirmed by the letter of assurances dated 18 October 1991 from the Government of the United States of America, as co-sponsor of the conference, to the Government of Lebanon.

I am pleased to report in this context that the national reconstruction and rehabilitation process is moving ahead. Efforts to rebuild the new commercial centre in downtown Beirut and to modernize the national infrastructure are ongoing. Priority has been given to basic services such as electricity, telecommunications, transportation, waterworks, schools and hospitals.

The Government of Lebanon avails itself of this opportunity to pay tribute to the UNIFIL Command, administrators, troops and troop-contributing countries for the noble efforts and sacrifices made in the cause of peace. It is, moreover, pleased to report that the Command of UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities continue to coordinate with the goal of deploying the Lebanese Army throughout the southern part of the country to its internationally recognized boundaries. In this regard, the Government of Lebanon considers that the operational strength and capacity of UNIFIL should be maintained.

Furthermore, the Government of Lebanon wishes to express its deep appreciation to the Secretary-General and his assistants for their tireless efforts, which contribute to the valuable presence of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Samir MOUBARAK
Ambassador
Permanent Representative